# 1

# The Alphabet

## *24 Letters, the Gateway into the Language*

**Small/Capital**

α / **Α** **Alpha** sounds like “a” in father.

β / **Β** **Beta** sounds like “b” in Bible.

γ / **Γ** **Gamma** sounds like “g” in gone.

δ / **Δ** **Delta** sounds like “d” in dog.

ε / **Ε** **Epsilon** sounds like “e” in met.

ζ / **Ζ** **Zeta** sounds like “z” in daze when it begins a word, “dz” when it’s in the middle of a word.

η / **Η** **Eta** sounds like “e” in obey.

θ / **Θ** **Theta** sounds like “th” in think.

ι / **Ι** **Iota** short sounds like the “i” in sit.
Iota long sounds like the “i” in machine. Modern Greek uses the long “i” as in machine. In initial positions, it is often found in Hebrew personal names, where it has a consonant “y” sound: **Ἰησοῦς** (Jesus/Yesus).

κ / **Κ** **Kappa** sounds like “k” in kitchen.

λ / **Λ** **Lambda** sounds like “l” in law.

μ / **Μ** **Mu** sounds like “m” in mother.

ν / **Ν** **Nu** sounds like “n” in new.

ξ / **Ξ** **Xsi** sounds like “x” in axe.

ο / **Ο** **Omicron** sounds like “o” in not or “o” in omelette. Some pronounce it like modern Greek, with a long “o” as in obey, others like Hansen and Quinn (*Greek: An Intensive Course*) use the “ou” sound in thought. Modern Greek uses a long “o” as in ocean.

π / **Π** **Pi** sounds like “p” in peach.

ρ / **Ρ** **Rho** sounds like “r” in rod.

σ / **Σ** **Sigma** sounds like “s” in set.
Sigma looks like ς when it comes at the end of a word (final sigma)—**σοφός** (wise).

τ / **Τ** **Tau** sounds like “t” in talk.

**υ / Υ** **Upsilon** sounds like "oo" in hoops. Modern Greek uses an "i"as in machine.
**φ / Φ** **Phi** sounds like "ph" in phone.
**χ / X** **Chi** sounds like "ch" in chemical.
**ψ / Ψ** **Psi** sounds like "ps" in lips.
**ω / Ω** **Omega** sounds like "o" in tone.

We will focus on the lower-case letters, miniscules, although the early uncial (uppercase) manuscripts were written without punctuation or spaces between the words in all uppercase letters, majuscules (major writings). Be able to recognize the upper-case letters. Capital letters are used in proper names, to begin direct quotations, and at the beginning of paragraphs. You may want to use the *Mastering New Testament Greek* disk to work on the pronunciation of these letters and to drill yourself.

Easy English look alikes: **α, β, ε, ι, κ, ο, ς, τ, υ**

Double consonants: **θ** (th), **ξ** (xs), **φ** (ph), **χ** (ch), **ψ** (ps)

Easy to confuse letters:
**η**—eta (with n)
**ν**—nu (with v)
**ρ**—rho (with p)
**χ**—chi (with x)
**ω**—omega (with w)

Here are some English-like examples to use for sounding things out. Pronounce the following, accenting the capitalized syllables:

**ανθρωπος**—pronounced "AN-thro-pos" (anthropology)
**θεος**—pronounced "the-OS" (theology)
**προφητης**—pronounced "pro-FA-tas" (two long a's) (prophets)
**Χριστος**—pronounced "Kri-STOS" (Christ)
**καρδια**—pronounced "kar-DE-a" (i = ee) (heart; cf. cardiac)
**αμην**—pronounced "a-MEIN" (ei = long a sound) (amen)

Vowels: **α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, ω**

| Short | Long |
|---|---|
| ε | η |
| ο | ω |

Can be either long or short: **α, ι, υ**

The iota will be pronounced three different ways:
1. Iota short sounds like "i" in "sit"

2. Iota long sounds like the "i" in "machine" (= modern Greek)
3. When it is initial in a Hebrew name, it sounds like a "y"—**᾽Ιησοῦς** (Jesus/Yesus)

**Nasal gamma:** The "g" sound of a gamma changes to a "n" sound when put before: **γ, κ, χ, ξ**. **ἄγγελος** is pronounced: "angelos." This is called a "nasal gamma."

**Final sigma:** Sigma is always written **σ** unless it comes at the end of a word, when it is written **ς**. This form is called a final sigma. It is pronounced the same. Thus **σοφός** (wise) shows the two forms of the sigma (note the final sigma form).

**Eight diphthongs:** 2 vowels with 1 sound. Diphthongs are combination vowels. Two vowels are written but result in only one sound. These are frequent in Greek, and so be aware of them. The final letter of a diphthong will always be an **ι** or an **υ** (closed vowel). The diphtongs in Modern Greek are the place of greatest phonetic divergence.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **αι** | as in aisle | (**α͡ἷμα**, blood) |
| **ει** | as in eight | (**ε͡ἰμί**, I am) |
| **οι** | as in oil | (**οἶκος**, house) |
| **υι** | as in suite | (**υ͡ἱός**, son) |
| **αυ** | as in sauerkaut | (**α͡ὐτός**, he) |
| **ευ, ηυ** | as in feud | (**πιστε͡ύω**, I believe) |
| **ου** | as in boutique | (**᾽Ιησο͡ῦς**, Jesus) |

All are considered long except **αι**, and **οι** when at the end of a word, where they are short.

**Iota subscripts** (Improper diphthongs): There are 3 letter combinations that are formed by taking the vowels **α, η,** and **ω** and subscripting an iota under them. It doesn't affect pronunciation but may be significant in specifying grammatical features: **ᾳ, ῃ, ῳ**

**Diaeresis** (**᾽Ησαΐας**–Isaiah: **᾽Η-σα-ι-ας**)—cancels the diphthong effect (indicates the two vowels must be kept separate). The diaeresis shows that a vowel must be pronounced as a separate syllable. It will be found often on Old Testament names (**Μωϋσῆς** = Moses).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **᾽Ησαΐας** | **᾽Η-σα-ΐ-ας** | Isaiah (Jn. 1:23) |
| **Μωϋσῆς** | **Μω-ϋ-σῆς** | Moses (Jn. 1:45) |
| **᾽Αχαΐα** | **᾽Α-χα-ΐ-α** | Achaia (Acts 18:12) |

A phonetic chart is also a helpful way of grouping the letters:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Labials (lips) | **π** | β | **φ** |
| Dentals (teeth) | **τ** | δ | **θ** |
| Velars (palate) | **κ** | γ | χ |

Phonetic sigma addition:

| Labial + *σ* = ψ | Velar + *σ* = ξ | Dental + *σ* = *σ* |
|---|---|---|
| **(π + *σ* = ψ)** | **(κ + *σ* = ξ)** | **(τ + *σ* = *σ*)** |

## Vocabulary

At this point don't worry about the accent marks over vowels except to stress that syllable (chapter 2 is on accents). The number following the word is the number of times the word is used in the New Testament. The word after the dash gives an English parallel.

| | |
|---|---|
| ἄγγελος | angel (175)—angel |
| ἀμήν | truly, verily (129)—amen |
| ἄνθρωπος | man, human (550)—anthropology |
| ἐγώ | I (1,175)—ego |
| θεός | God (1,317)—theology |
| καί | and, even, also (9,153) |
| καρδία | heart (156)—cardiac |
| λέγω | I say (2,354) |
| προφήτης | prophet (144)—prophet |
| **Χ**ριστός | Christ, Messiah, anointed one (529)—Christ |

## Things to Know and Do

1. Be able to chant through the alphabet, saying the name of each letter in order. Be able to do the Alpha-robics moves. See if you can say the Greek alphabet as fast as you can say the English alphabet. Can you see where the name "alphabet" comes from? Know what a final sigma looks like. What are diphthongs, and what sound does each make? Know which vowels are long and short and which can be either. What are the three iota subscripts? What role does the diaeresis play? Know the vocabulary items (recognize and write them).
2. Work on the drills and exercises in *Mastering New Testament Greek, Interactive* chapter 1.
3. Do the worksheets from the workbook.